

Athy College Kildare

Athy College, a Co. Kildare VEC school, has been involved in the Instructional Leadership (IL) Programme since 2008. The team initially trained was the Deputy Principal, an English teacher, and 2 teachers whose subjects are J.C. Science, Biology, Chemistry, Maths, I.T., P.E. and C.S.P.E. Athy College was already a pilot school for the NCCA's research on Key Skills and we could immediately see the huge potential of IL for building the skills, tactics and strategies to make learning and teaching intentionally excellent. It works!

The team initially played with some of the strategies in our own classrooms and used them at staff and planning meetings. We meet for 40 minutes each week to cascade the project – a seriously pleasurable “free” class. The response of staff is receptive and encouraging, having management involvement (right up to CEO level) ensured that IL was prioritised. We held an in-school session of peer professional development (daunting!). Since then these 2 hour sessions have been held twice yearly. The staff response was such that we set up a Teaching and Learning Club (TLC for short) and we meet after school every 3 weeks for 20 minutes (a timer is set). At each meeting another skill or tactic or organiser is shared. Teachers give feedback on how the innovations are going in their classrooms and bring samples of student work. Up to 80% of staff attends even though it's on their own time. We even had a DES inspector join us one evening during a subject inspection. She was really impressed.

Most important the student response to their experience is that learning is more fun because it's active. They register that skills learned in one classroom – e.g. placemat, teams games tournament, group work, snowballing, think/pair/share, mind maps, concept maps, 4 corners, PMI, academic controversy etc– are transferable to other classrooms. Recently a class asked if on their own time they could watch “Casablanca” again to prepare for a teams games tournament next day! Students' social and co-operative learning skills are perceptibly enhanced.

Instructional Leadership makes classrooms come alive. If you'd like more information we'd love to talk to you.

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